



Getting More from our Students...More what?

More responsibility

More active involvement

More high quality work

More good behavior

What do the BEST instructors do to elicit the BEST from their students?

EXPECTATIONS ARE CLEAR

The course syllabus clearly defines what the instructor expects, including those things above. Most of us do write our policies (attendance, grading, make up testing, etc), but many of us do not actually write in the syllabus how we expect students to **behave**. This is an opportunity to help your students understand your **values** about learning your subject and how to behave in the classroom.

EXPECTATIONS ARE EXPLICIT

If you give an assignment and you want it typed/word processed, SAY SO. If you don't say it, some students will not assume they need to type. If you give a writing assignment and you expect students to write in complete sentences, using paragraphs, SAY SO. Better yet, give them a scoring guide that shows them what you will be grading them on.

Sometimes college instructors do believe that students "ought" to know what "normal" college work is. Those instructors are usually disappointed. We cannot assume that students do know, nor can we assume students will ask. We can quite easily show students what we expect by

- Creating clear assignment directions
- Giving students the grading rubric along with the assignment directions
- Showing students samples of acceptable work from previous students
- Showing students samples of excellent work from previous students
- Being clear about deadlines, extensions (if offered), and consequences (if any)



INSTRUCTORS LISTEN TO STUDENTS

No matter how thoroughly our curriculum is prepared, every class creates its own community of learners, its own dynamic, its own momentum. But we might miss all that if we don't carefully listen to what our students say to us, what they ask us, and what they say to each other.

We can give our students opportunities to let us in on their thoughts in several ways. **Class discussions** are one way. But quiet students may not say much, and dominating students may say too much! **One minute writes** (which of course could be extended to two or even three minutes!) allow every student to have time to respond to your prompt. If they are anonymous, they also invite frankness. **D2L** offers ways for students to share their ideas using the discussion function as well as the chat room. These may be archived, to be analyzed later. **Pairs work** is another way to encourage everyone to participate. One student can explain something to the other, pose a question, offer an opinion, or make a comment. The other student can respond. Then they can switch roles. An instructor may provide certain questions, topics, or prompts to the pairs. **Small groups** can good conversation starters as long as the groups are not too big (5 max) and as long as the group has a clear task. If one person can be the recorder, then their ideas may be turned in to the instructor or written on a large easel sheet. It is a good idea to have the first task of a group to be "introduce yourselves."

As we hear what is on our students' minds, we can respond to them (even very quickly) with a comment the next day or by putting a little summary of their ideas or thoughts on an overhead and just showing it for a minute. These tactics validate your students' contributions. One thing that bugs students is when we ask for their ideas, and then never follow up with them on any of them. (Bugs me too!)

INSTRUCTORS DEAL WITH CONFLICT

Many college instructors are not well trained in classroom management or with de-escalating conflicts with or between students. So they ignore the behavior, hoping it will go away. Or they overreact, sometimes in front of the whole class. Neither technique is very useful. Here are some ideas to try.

A student challenges you loudly. Maybe a question on a test is the problem. Or maybe you've marked her late or absent, according to your policy. What do you do with a belligerent student? First, slow everything down. Pause before you say anything. Don't let her uproar become yours. Second, when you do speak, use a very calm tone of voice. No sarcasm, no yelling. Just make a statement something like, "That is something we will discuss one on one, not in class. Please see me right after class and we can make an appointment." Sometimes it helps to describe what you are hearing. "I can tell you're

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upset.” Or, “I hear you and I understand this is important to you.” But you cannot let a student take over the class. Be firm, and be a broken record if necessary. “This is not a class matter, it is a personal matter. We will discuss it outside of class.”

Usually, when a teacher asserts her authority by maintaining calm, being grounded in her own ideas about what is okay or not okay to take up class time, students respond as they should.

A student arrives late every day, which is interruptive. It is tempting to say something to the student in front of the class, or to make some indication that you’re irritated. Resist. Instead, approach the student one on one at some point during class, or just before the end. A good line is, “Is everything okay?” That is not what the student is expecting to hear. It makes you seem concerned instead of judgmental. You’ll get a response like, “What do you mean?” That is a good time to say, “I’ve noticed that you’re always quite late to class. I’m concerned that you are missing out on a lot of information [or that you are losing valuable points, if that is the case]. I want you to succeed in this class. Can we make an appointment to discuss this so we can put together a better plan?” When you do meet with the student, that is the time to let him know that it is also very disruptive to the class, and that you just can’t keep tolerating it. But, your main points should have to do with the **natural consequences** of being chronically late: missed announcements, missed content, perhaps missed participation, quizzes, etc.

A key concept in managing the classroom is to **never** become embroiled in an argument or stand off in front of other students. Simply refuse. You are buying yourself time to figure out how to handle the situation AND you are maintaining control of the class. You hand over too much power to a student if you allow him to take control of what happens in class.

Even if the “issue” is a test question, and other students also are upset, still tell them that you have to limit the in-class discussion because the issue only applies to a small number of students. This forces the students, if they really want to pursue this, to show up later in your office to talk. You can also say, quite honestly, that you don’t want to make a decision without careful consideration. Sometimes I have placated students by telling them that if they miss a grade by one point at the end of the semester, I will reconsider that test question. (That doesn’t happen very often.)

INSTRUCTORS CREATE A FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

The affective side of learning is very powerful. Every class has students who are afraid they won’t do well, or have had a bad experience in school. Instructors who strive for a safe environment to ask questions, who smile, who have a sense of humor (especially not directed to make fun of students!), who learn students’ names, and who seem genuinely interested in their students (not just in their subject matter) help allay student fears and actually retain students better. In fact, many first generation college students feel that

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having a connection with their instructors actually can make the difference between success and failure.

I happen to like **cartoons** or other jokes that I can put on an overhead projector at the beginning of class. Even with our diverse population, humor can be a real plus. Joking around a little is also fine, although sarcasm is not, especially if it is actually making fun of students. **Puzzles** or other game-like activities, even very short things, also are great relaxers. If they are related to your subject, that is a great way to show your students another side of your discipline.

Learn students' names. Even in a large class, ask students to write their name on a piece of notebook paper (large, and in the middle), and then fold the paper to hang down from the desk or table. That way, you can call on them by name. After a while, you'll learn many of the names, if not all. (An MCTC twist: also pronounce the names correctly. Ask, if you don't know. Practice a couple of times in front of the student. Let them know it is important to you that you get it right.)

Take student questions seriously. Especially at the beginning of the semester, treat each question respectfully. Only after you have established the importance of asking good questions should you start to quibble about some of them. If a student asks a question that is out of the course's boundaries, just say so. If you already answered that question earlier, say so (gently), but then offer to talk with the student later if they have further questions about it. Listen very carefully as students ask questions, because sometimes they don't really know how to frame their question. You might have to be patient.

Learn something about your students. Ask them what they want to major in. Ask them where they went to school prior to MCTC. Ask if they have children, are new in town (or the US), what they did over a long weekend, if they have a job, etc. Obviously, you won't grill them all at once! But if you show interest in them, they will feel more comfortable.

Relinquish the front of the room. Walk around the room. Teach from the side or back. Ask students to come to the board and write things sometimes (never as a way to embarrass them, however).

INSTRUCTORS USE ACTIVE LEARNING METHODS

See the other materials for ideas of ways to be more active in the classroom. Large or small, your class can be more interactive. It is much easier to stand and lecture than it is to create activities that are meaningful; I admit it. But, when you realize how little students remember from lecture alone (and, if you are concerned about real learning), it is worth it. Imagine if you didn't have to reteach so much of your material, how much more time you'd have in class to do more active things. And once you've tried a few

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active methods, you will want to do more of them. When students are more active, they are more likely to come to class prepared. They won't be able to just sit and listen, so they'll get used to the idea that you expect them to get up and write on a board, explain something to a partner, write something for you, take a little quiz, etc. If all they do is sit and listen everyday, there isn't much incentive to come prepared. The path of least resistance...

INFUSE ALL THESE IDEAS

How many ways can you infuse the above ideas into your teaching? What will your syllabus look like? How will you conduct class? How will you interact with students? What will your students be doing every day in class?

The following pages are excerpts from several of our colleagues' syllabi that I found on their web sites.

Remember, you don't have to make sweeping changes to see a positive result!



Sample Syllabus Sections



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The Culture of the Class*

What to Call Me: Call me "Steve" (my first name) or "Mr. Kaufman"—whichever you're more comfortable with.

Mutual Respect: I expect that each of us will treat others with respect. Students at MCTC are expected to act in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct in the Student Handbook. Please take a few minutes to read it.

Classroom Conduct & Discussion Guidelines: MCTC has a policy on classroom conduct, and we will adhere to it. Disorderly and disruptive behavior in the classroom is unacceptable because it imposes on the freedom, rights, and safety of others and prevents us from doing what we are here for: learning. During class discussion, we'll follow certain guidelines to nurture a productive classroom environment. When you wish to speak, please raise your hand and wait to be acknowledged. Discussions will sometimes become heated. It's ok to disagree with classmates or instructor, but I expect we will all express our thoughts in a civil and respectful manner. It's not ok to interrupt classmates or instructor. Insulting or demeaning comments or behavior are not tolerated at this college.

Punctuality: You've probably already discovered that showing up on time is important—in college and on the job. Coming to class late is not only disruptive, it's disrespectful to the rest of the group.

Where to Get Help: If you have questions about the course, or if you're struggling with any aspect of it, come see me. Let's talk it over. I can help. That's what my office hours are for. (You can also come see me if you don't have questions and are not struggling! I enjoy visiting with students. That's one reason I went into teaching.) Tip: Don't wait to get help. If you wait, it may be too late.

Another Great Place to get help is the Learning Center in T-4300. Peer tutors are available to coach you and help you succeed. In addition, a series of writing "mini-sessions" is offered each semester. Studies show that students who take advantage of the resources at the Learning Center are more likely to pass the course than those who don't.

Cell Phone Policy: As I'm sure you've noticed, cell phones can be disruptive. Calls are not to be made or received during class. If you have a cell phone, make sure it is turned off, or in the "silent" mode, during class.

Drug and Alcohol Policy: MCTC is a drug and alcohol-free campus. Please take a minute to read the policy in the Student Handbook.



Access for Individuals with Disabilities: If you have a disability you feel may interfere with your success in this course, please discuss it with me. If you are working with MCTC's Office for Students with Disabilities, you may be entitled to certain accommodations, such as extra time on assignments. If you need assistance to access college programs, services, or activities, contact the Disability Services Office in T-2400, (612) 659-6730 (voice) or (612) 659-6731 (TTY). Information about the Americans with Disabilities Act, and the rights provided thereunder, is available from Jane Larson, Director.

Equal Opportunity in Employment and Education: MCTC is committed to a policy of equal opportunity. If you feel you've been harassed or discriminated against because of your race, sex, color, creed, religion, age, national origin, disability, marital status, status with regard to public assistance, sexual orientation, or membership or activity in a local commission, contact the Director of Legal Affairs in K-1300, (612) 659-6319.

Sexual Harassment Policy: Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination, which is prohibited by state and federal law. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, sexually motivated physical contact, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Any student who feels she or he has been the target of sexual harassment may file a complaint with the Director of Equal Opportunity in K-1300, (612) 659-6319.

*from Steve Kaufman's ENGL 900 syllabus



TIPS FOR SUCCESS: *

**Attend every class*, and take notes during the lectures.

**Do not get behind*, each class assumes that you understood the previous lecture and assigned reading

**If you're Absent* get a friend's notes.

**Ask for help*: ask questions in class; work with friends; come to my office hours; get free tutoring at the learning assistance center.

**Attend field trips* if at all possible. They do help you understand some of the topics covered better!

HAVE A GOOD SEMESTER!

*from Nick Taylor's GEOL 1120 syllabus



Class Participation * Students are expected and required to participate in e-discussion and e-activities. Your grade depends on your interaction during the semester. Reading the assignments and doing the assignments are expected to be completed each week and not do it in spurts or at the end of the course. See Course Schedule for mandatory class meetings.

Communication Skills The Information Technology Department trains students in the technical skills necessary to obtain employment in an entry-level computer programming or network support position. Students, whose reading, writing or speaking of English may impede their ability to communicate and thereby obtain employment, are encouraged to take additional communication courses outside the Information Technology Department. Students should communicate in English, while in school, to further practice and enhance their English language skills. Instructors may insist on “English only” in class or lab. All written assignments must be submitted in “correct” English.

Disabilities Accommodations: If you need an accommodation to participate in this class, please contact the Office for Students with Disabilities at 612/659-6730, TTY: 612/659-6731 or me. I am eager to make accommodations to guarantee to persons with disabilities access to my class sessions, course materials, and the activities of the class.

Student Classroom Conduct Disorderly and disruptive behavior in the classroom is unacceptable, especially if it imposes on the freedom, rights and safety of others. Any and all computer game playing during class is strictly forbidden. *Beepers and cellular phones must be turned off prior to the beginning of class.* Continual tardiness will not be tolerated and may result in a reduction of your grade.

Cheating and Plagiarism *Cheating, Plagiarism, and/or Academic Dishonesty will not be tolerated.* Violations are subject to disciplinary actions which may lead to expulsion. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to the use of paraphrasing or direct quotation, the published or unpublished work of another person (including other students) without full and clear acknowledgement; and unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaging in selling or otherwise providing term papers or other academic materials. For more information see - Student Code of Conduct.

E-mail– Students are expected to look at their MCTC e-mail at least twice a week and respond to any e-mail sent by Dr. Pollak in a timely manner.

*from Rich Pollak’s COMP 1100 syllabus



Teaching Philosophy*

When I approach the teaching of writing, there are a number of principles that I always follow. They are listed here for you to read and think about before we begin this course.

Writing is a skill, and like other skills, the only way to develop it is through much practice and response (in short, expect to do a great deal of writing, to receive a great deal of response, and to produce a great deal of response).

Writing is most meaningful when it is shared with others (in short, expect to share your writing with others, sometimes in small groups, sometimes in large groups).

Learning is best done in collaborative, workshop settings, where students work together on a regular and consistent basis, and where the primary content of the course is the work that they produce.

Learning is best done when students are active creators of knowledge, rather than passive recipients of it (in short, expect to participate, to think, to be pushed to excel, to have your opinions both respected and challenged, to take responsibility and--in large measure--control of your educational process).

Learning is work, learning is effort, learning is fun (in short, expect to be overwhelmed at certain points, expect to laugh, expect to get excited about what you and the rest of class are doing).

Since writing is a skill, I believe everyone can learn to write well (granted, it may not happen in a short, sixteen-week semester, but at least we can start moving in the right direction).

What we do in this course can make a difference, both inside and outside of the classroom; the choice is up to us.

*from Jane Leach's ENGL 1111 syllabus



Student Contributions*

1. Talk with the instructor within the drop/add period, the first 5 days of the semester, if the class is too easy or too difficult.
2. Talk to the instructor early in the semester if you have special physical needs that affect your learning. Qualified students with disabilities will be provided reasonable and necessary academic accommodations if determined eligible by the Office of Students with Disabilities. Prior to granting accommodations in this class, I must receive written verification of a student's eligibility for specific accommodations from the disability services staff.
3. Try to sit with people from countries other than your own. Using only English in class improves your language skills and shows courtesy to classmates who don't speak your language.
4. Turn off all cell phones and pagers. Do not take calls during class.
5. You are responsible for timely attendance to class, for active participation in all activities, and for being prepared with homework or readings. More than 10 absences will result in a grade of "F".
6. Expect homework every day.
7. You are responsible for understanding all lectures and assignments. Always ask questions if you do not understand something.
8. You are responsible for assignments even when absent. These must be handed in or e-mailed by the assigned dates if you wish to receive credit. It is recommended that you keep the instructor's phone number and e-mail address at home for this purpose. You may always take quizzes or turn in assignments early, but no late assignments will be accepted.
9. Proof of attendance at a relevant Learning Center "mini-session" or short story discussion group can substitute for attendance of a missed reading class.
10. You are responsible for notifying your instructor when you must be unavoidably absent. Only one makeup exam will be allowed per semester, providing that you have contacted your instructor on or before the day of your absence. It will be given in the Testing Center, according to posted hours. Additional missed exams will be zeros.
11. Anyone can have a "bad day". Your lowest quiz score will be dropped before final grades are calculated.
12. Any form of cheating (not doing work that is completely your own) will result in a grade of "F: on that first assignment or quiz. Cheating a second time will result in an "F" for the course.
13. Treat each member of the class with respect and courtesy. Harassment of any kind is unacceptable and will be dealt with according to MCTC's code of conduct found in the MCTC College Catalog.

***from Deb Ramerth's ESOL 0042**

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from ADEV 1100*

No late journal entries, discussion board postings, or homework will be accepted. You must place journal entries and/or homework on the table at the front of the room at the beginning of the class period that it is due. The discussion board postings or responses will be due by midnight at the end of each Tuesday. If you are absent the day an assignment is due, you must hand in the homework at the beginning of class the day you return.

In-class activities or assignments are also very important! You will work in groups of two or three to complete an assignment. It is important that you work as a team and that all students in the group have contributed to the work. Those assignments **may not** be made up. **This is in-class work; if you are absent, you will not have an opportunity to do that activity.**

Any work that is handed in as your own must be your own. If we determine that you have turned in someone else's work, you will receive 0 points for that assignment.

An incomplete (I) grade is given only in extremely unusual circumstances, such as hospitalization, and only after a student has already earned at least 60% of the total points, which is 720 points.

Attendance: Attendance will be taken. If you miss more than 375 minutes or almost four class periods, you will receive an F for the class.

The main ground rule of this class is MUTUAL RESPECT. We will respect all of you by doing our best to help you and to not make fun of you or humiliate you. We also expect that you would show respect to your classmates and to us by coming to class on time, by not talking at inappropriate times, and by not humiliating or making fun of anyone. Lastly, we ask that you respect the amount of time and energy that we put into organizing and teaching this class. If you are concerned about the content of the class or the way we teach it, please see either or both of us to discuss your thoughts. Thank you.

*from Linda Russell and Mary Thurow's ADEV 1100